

**REMARKS OF ANNETTE SANDBERG, ADMINISTRATOR
FEDERAL MOTOR CARRIER SAFETY ADMINISTRATION
TO THE UNITED MOTORCOACH ASSOCIATION
ATLANTA, GEORGIA
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Thank you for inviting me to be here with you today.

Safety Goal

Safety IS at the very heart of our mission at the U.S. Department of Transportation and FMCSA. And President Bush and this Administration are committed to fostering the safest, most secure national transportation system possible.

At the Department of Transportation, we are pursuing initiatives to enhance economic growth and job creation to improve mobility and reduce congestion while making transportation safer. We are not willing to accept what has become far too commonplace—people dying on our roads every day.

To accomplish our goal we must choose to end the acceptance of death on our roads. Last year we lost nearly 43,000 people on our nation's highways. More than 5,000 of them were in truck-involved crashes.

In addition to the human cost, the cost of these crashes on our overall economy and healthcare system is staggering. In 2000, motor vehicle crashes consumed \$32.6 billion in the area of medical costs.

The entire Federal budget for our national highways is \$33 billion, which means that Americans paid as much in medical costs related to motor vehicle crashes as the Federal Government did to repair, maintain, and build our roads.

Under Secretary Mineta's leadership, we are taking new approaches, finding new solutions, and working with our valued partners, to achieve a higher level of safety and security for all Americans.

Each year in the U.S., the motorcoach industry carries more than 500 million passengers. It is an integral part of our economy. At the same time, motorcoaches are one of the safest forms of commercial passenger transportation. And working together, we can make this industry even safer.

SAFETEA

There are a number of important safety initiatives underway at FMCSA and the U.S. Department of Transportation. This past spring, the President transmitted to Congress the Department of Transportation's highway reauthorization proposal.

SAFETEA—the Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003—is the largest surface and public transportation investment in U.S. history. It is a six -year, \$256 billion proposal. The proposal is organized along three themes: Safer, Simpler, Smarter. SAFETEA provides the framework to maintain and grow transportation infrastructure and provides funding to reduce fatalities and increase security on our highways.

Last week, Transportation Secretary Mineta and Treasury Secretary Snow delivered to congressional leadership a letter reaffirming the Bush Administration’s position on the principles and appropriate funding level for SAFETEA. As Congress begins work on the proposal, the Department felt it was necessary to restate the three important principles upon which the President’s original proposal was based.

First, transportation infrastructure spending should not rely on an increase in the gas tax or other federal taxes. Second, transportation infrastructure spending should not be funded through bonding or other mechanisms that conceal the true cost to federal taxpayers. And third, highway spending should be financed from the Highway Trust Fund, not the General Fund of the Treasury.

Also the letter said that if a surface transportation reauthorization bill that breaches any of these three principles were presented to the President, his senior advisors would recommend that he veto the bill.

The Administration’s proposal gets the job done without raising taxes or increasing the deficit. And the Administration has expressed its willingness to work with Congress to pass a responsible bill as soon as possible.

Regulation Development

A new reauthorization law will bring with it new programs to implement and new rulemakings to start. One bill directs FMCSA to start over a dozen rulemakings.

While Congress debates the details of the next reauthorization bill, FMCSA is working hard to reduce the backlog of overdue rulemakings. We are making good progress. At the start of 2003, we had 41 open rulemakings. By the end of 2003, we had 29.

I’ve directed staff to reduce the number even further this year. And I’m confident the total number will shrink, even as new rulemakings are added. After all, FMCSA published 83 *Federal Register* documents in the last 17 months. In the last six months alone, 49 such documents have been published. This includes everything from notices for vision exemptions, establishing an insulin-treated diabetes program, proposed rules on driver training, and the final rule on Hours-of-Service.

The list of requests for changes to our regulations never seems to diminish. Without a new reauthorization, the authority to fund new rulemaking activities just doesn’t exist. As a result, the list of requests will get longer.

Data Quality

Another area of importance is data. Data drive our programs and provide the scientific basis from which the Agency makes decisions. But the engine that powers this effort needs a tune up. The average time to upload a crash report to FMCSA is 120 days—a full month greater than called for by

federal guidelines. The average time to upload an inspection is 36 days. The guidelines call for 21 days.

By law, we are required to implement measures that improve and maintain the quality of our data. The Department's Inspector General (IG) has been working on an audit of the SafeStat process. We anticipate getting the final audit report in the near future.

But while the IG has been working, FMCSA has studied how to create a better way to respond to carriers' data quality concerns. We are testing new procedures and methods to make the SafeStat process more efficient.

Enforcement

Good data is important—because it helps us focus our enforcement activities in the right direction. FMCSA relies heavily on enforcement operations conducted at the State level. Enforcement helps save lives, and is the key to maintaining compliance with regulations. We will continue to work with you to focus our enforcement activities—compliance reviews, roadside inspections, and traffic enforcement—to make our roads safer. And we'll continue to work with you to get uninsured and other illegal motorcoach operators off our highways.

Recently, the Agency revamped the insurance revocation process by reducing administrative processing time, mailing revocation letters sooner, and notifying State law enforcement partners faster. The amount of time a motorcoach company can hold operating authority without insurance has dropped to just 6 days. Before the changes, uninsured companies wouldn't get their revocation letter until almost 3 months had passed. UMA played a critical role by alerting us to the need for this change. *Thank you!* This is a great example of industry and government cooperating to make our roads safer.

And, more changes are coming. FMCSA will start cross-match insurance revocations with inspection and crash databases, and generate automated claim letters for prompt field enforcement action. Where a carrier shows inspection or crash activity during the time that its insurance is suspended, FMCSA will know the company is operating without authority and enforcement action will be swift. These matches will be done electronically, supplementing field observations of motor carrier operations. These changes underscore FMCSA's commitment to increased safety.

New Entrant Program

Addressing new entrants is a big challenge, as from 40 to 50 thousand new carriers enter the business every year. They have a disproportionate share of commercial vehicle highway incidents.

We and our partners intend to perform face-to-face audits of these new carriers to assess their safety status and provide necessary education. Three key areas will be evaluated: knowledge and applicability of safety regulations, safety management systems, and safety readiness.

Bus Safety Web Section

To complement our enforcement efforts, the Agency is developing a section on our Web site to help consumers select a safe bus company. This project began in October 2002 and developed from our Moving Kids Safely program, which focuses on connecting the public to safe bus companies to transport school children to and from sporting events, field trips and extracurricular activities.

The web section will provide objective, unbiased guidance of what type of vehicle or service could meet certain needs. Once the consumer has chosen a suitable vehicle and the appropriate geographical area, the web section will provide clear and easy to understand safety and licensing/insurance information about the potential service providers to help them make a safe transportation choice. We expect this project to be implemented and available to the public later this year.

Realignment of Bus Division

Finally, the Commercial Passenger Carrier Safety Division has been realigned to the Office of Enforcement and Compliance. The alignment strengthens the Agency's ability to develop, manage, and implement programs through our field staff and other stakeholders to promote passenger carrier compliance with safety regulations.

Close

Working together we can further improve the safety of the commercial motorcoach industry. Thank you for having me here today. I'd be happy to respond to your questions.